



PAPAN TURAI GAWAI BATU: HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the cultural and historical significance of a two-piece mnemonic board possessed by the Iban community. Iban bards utilise *Papan Turai Gawai Batu* to recount *pengap* (rites) during a *Gawai Batu* or whetstone feast. The board has 25 hieroglyphs with each part accompanied by *pengap*. The board is historically significant on two grounds; first, it is a piece of evidence on Iban civilisation during the pre-history period; Secondly, the use of the board as a mnemonic device contributes to the sustenance of cultural practices of one of the largest ethnic groups in Borneo. The *pengap* contained rich data on the Iban's traditional belief system which is an entrenched part of their agrarian activities. It also informs about Iban's genealogy, ancestral figures, and contacts with the Malay, Bukitan, Seru, Maloh, and Kantu people in pre-historic times. These data sources trace the migratory history of the Iban from Kapuas to Batang Lupar and its tributaries. The *Papan Turai* depicts cultural practices that have survived through generations since pre-historic times. Although the *Gawai Batu* practice has declined tremendously over the years, parallel with the decline of the Iban's traditional occupation, i.e. paddy cultivation, the practice has persevered. It continues to be a significant part of the Iban's culture. The fact that the Iban *Papan Turai* as a mnemonic device can preserve the cultural practices of one of the largest groups in Borneo deserves regional, if not world heritage recognition.